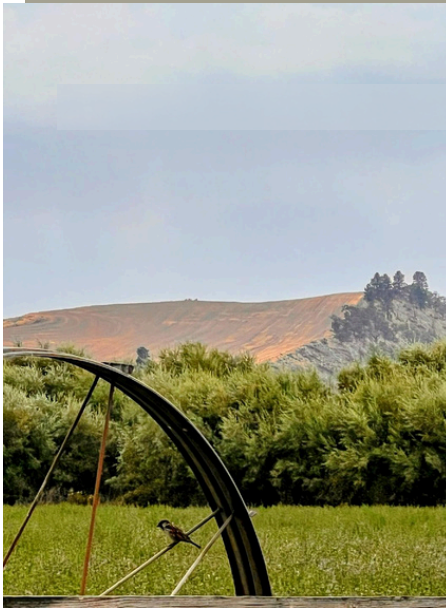


wasco county watershed councils

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

The watershed assessments for the five watersheds with established councils were updated in 2023 as the original assessments were nearing 20 years old. The watershed assessments are foundational documents for the councils because of their ability to document and detail conditions within the watershed that can be used as a springboard for the identification of new projects. The updated assessments also include new sections that reflect changing paradigms in conservation, such as fire, climate, and surface water allocation.

The councils hope to apply for funding to update the watershed council action plans next based on information from the updated assessments. This step will see the councils identifying a new list of priority projects for each of their watersheds. The action plans were completed in 2005, updated in 2015, and the council intends on maintaining the 10 year update window in 2025.

COORDINATING BOARD

MOSIER WATERSHED

FIFTEENMILE WATERSHED

The Board met quarterly last year starting in July when officer positions were elected. Agenda items throughout the year included completing the OWEB Evaluation Assessment tool, reviewing and updating the council By-laws, hearing updates from the individual councils, as well as discussing upcoming projects and funding opportunities. The CB provided several letters of support for pending grant applications, as well as presented updates to the County Commissioners.

The Mosier Watershed Council met quarterly throughout the year, including the hosting of a social gathering in the Summer of 2023. The watershed council continues to be focused on groundwater, with presentations on the monitoring well data, and the Mosier Million projects as well as forest health and fire resiliency. Meetings included updates from ODFW, USFS, ECOP, NRCS, and OWRD. The council was also working on ways to provide assistance to Mosier residents who are having to haul water due to wells going dry.

The Fifteenmile Watershed council met quarterly throughout the year, with much of their focus on the FAST program, updates on the MUS, and hearing from ODFW on fish monitoring efforts. Additionally, Fifteenmile Watershed received considerable attention from other agencies including a developing water budget study from OWRD and USGS, a new SNOTEL site from NRCS, and a new Agrimet weather station provided by Bureau of Reclamation. Project updates are below.

THE DALLES WATERSHED

BAKEOVEN / BUCK HOLLOW

WHITE RIVER WATERSHED

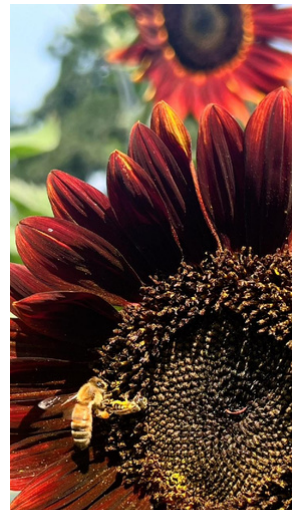
The Dalles Watershed Council met quarterly last year, with much of their focus being turned to the PSP program as they worked through guiding the creation of the strategic plan. Other topics of interest to the council are the ongoing E. coli monitoring in Mill Creek and Chenoweth Creek restoration.

The Bakeoven council met twice last year to continue progress on the uplands restoration project. They received updates from NRCS and discussed funding strategies for continued restoration and enhancement activities on their ranches. Many projects have been completed including 3 solar livestock watering facilities, cross fences and range spraying.

White River held one meeting last year. Although participation in the council has been low, those in attendance heard updates from the USFS, ODFW as well as our local partners with updates on Farm Bill Programs.

Status and Trend Monitoring - Mill Creek & Fifteenmile Creek

The Dalles Fish Monitoring Project continued in 2023, which will be the second to last year of tagging funded by the project. The fyke traps in Chenoweth and Threemile Creeks were removed from the project for this year due to low capture rates observed in both traps. The Mill Creek screw trap was operational in April and continued to fish through June. Abundant early season water caused some challenging conditions as large wood frequently fouled the trap. Outmigrant estimates for 2023 were down from 2022, with 3,946 estimated outmigrating steelhead and 1,725 estimated outmigrating Coho Salmon.



Smolt outmigrant abundance estimates from the Fifteenmile Creek fish monitoring project were slightly better in 2023 than in 2022, with 10,285 outmigrating smolt estimated leaving Fifteenmile Creek.



FAST & Managed Underground Storage Project

FAST continued for another successful season in 2023, with the most acres and total rate of water rights enrolled in the program's history. A better water year than recent years combined with a relatively mild summer allowed for us to move through the summer with no FAST stream temperature alerts being issued. This offered some respite to FAST participants, who dealt with significantly more alert days in 2021 and 2022 than in previous years.



2023 saw the completion of the first phase of pilot testing for the Fifteenmile Managed Underground Storage facility. Unfortunately, testing for the basin returned unfavorable results due to slower than anticipated infiltration rates provided by the native sediment. Additional funding has been obtained from OWEB to support a second phase of pilot testing for the MUS facility, offering a chance to tweak some of the design aspects of the MUS in an attempt to achieve the desired results. We plan to work with a soil specialist from Oregon State University to identify an appropriate, cost-effective substrate if the native sediment proves to be insufficient.

White River Irrigation

The White River irrigation project is ongoing with a target completion date of December 2024. All wells have been certified, and staff are working with participating landowners on irrigation system upgrades and ensuring alternative water sources for those who rely on Highline Ditch for irrigation water.

Water Quality Monitoring & PSP

2023 was a busy year for the PSP program, with the creation of the PSP strategic plan, as well as several PSP Advisory Council meetings with interested stakeholders that helped guide the that effort. Malathion is the only identified pesticide of high concern within the Wasco PSP, while Glyphosate and its degradate AMPA are the only two chemicals of moderate concern. The detection frequency of Malathion was higher in 2023 than in 2022; however, the concentration of those detections was much lower in 2023 than in 2022. Mill Creek at Wright Road had two Malathion detections, while Threemile Creek at 197 had 3 Malathion detections. Glyphosate was detected in 50% of samples in 2023, but the concentrations of these detections were microscopic in comparison to the aquatic life benchmark.



The 2023 Mill Creek E. coli sampling season included new sampling sites and additional early season sampling in Whisky Gulch to try to better determine the source of contamination within the tributary. This revised sampling design was developed with input from DEQ in an attempt to try to eliminate possible sources of E. coli within the watershed. Certain springs, tributaries, and outlet pipes in the Whisky Gulch neighborhood were sampled, but most returned relatively fair water quality results. E. coli concentrations in the main stem of Mill Creek were fairly consistent with previous years. The council hopes to conduct more late season sampling in the 2024 season than in previous years, focusing on Whisky Gulch, Skyline Tributary, and the upper portion of Mill Creek.

Mosier Million #2

The district received ARPA funding through Biz Oregon to continue repair/replacement of commingling wells in the Mosier area, representing the second round of the "Mosier Million" Project. Initial desktop and in-field assessments have been completed on known eligible wells. The district issued 2 separate RFP's to provide opportunities for interested well drillers to pre-qualify for the driller pool. The first 3 wells to be repaired have been selected and agreed upon by the associated landowners and were out to bid at the end of the fiscal year. Funding must be obligated by the end of 2024 and the project is due for completion by 2026.